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## OF AUTUMN

Autumn in our zone is unique among the seasons. It is at once the happiest and the saddest time of the year—the “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”, and the season of “the melancholy days”. It is a dual season, and yet a unity. The other seasons are not so.

### I

When we think of winter, it is of driving snow and pitiless cold, of ugly inertness and death.

“Lastly came Winter, cloathed all in frize,  
Chattering his teeth for cold that did him chill;  
Whilst on his hoary beard his breath did freese,  
And the dull drops, that from his purpled bill  
As from a limebeck did adown distill:  
In his right hand a tipped staffe he held,  
With which his feeble steps he stayed still;  
For he was faint with cold, and weak with eld;  
That scarce his loosed limbes he able was to weld.”

The poets do not love winter. If their thoughts of it touch beauty at all, it is the beauty of placid moments when all the earth lies, like a Sorraete, white-shining with deep snow. If they conceive of happiness, it is not the happiness of external nature, but the good-cheer of men and women enjoying shelter and fire, or the delight of boys and girls at play in the keen air, or the contentment of beasts in fold or stall. Happiness of nature there is none. Winter is the cruel season, the season without pity, the tragic season, and December is the tragic month;—

“Last of all the shrunk December,  
Cowled for age, in ashes gray;  
Fading like a fading ember,—  
Last of all the shrunk December.  
Him regarding, men remember  
Life and joy must pass away.”

The poets do not love winter. If they praise it, it is only when happy escape from its cruelties is uppermost in fancy;

when thoughts of the joy of challenge and resistance and the exaltation of victory set imagination aglow.

“Then let the icy North wind blow  
 The trumpets of the coming storm,  
 To arrowy sleet and blinding snow  
 Yon slanting lines of rain transform.  
 Young hearts shall hail the drifted cold  
 As gaily as I did of old ;  
 And I, who watch them through the frosty pane,  
 Unenvious, live in them my boyhood o’er again.”

## II

Our thoughts of spring are almost as simple and consistent.

“May the jocund cometh after,  
 Month of all the Loves (and mine) ;  
 Month of mock and cuckoo laughter,—  
 May the jocund cometh after.  
 Beaks are gay on roof and rafter ;  
 Luckless lovers peak and pine.”

At mention of spring the mind is filled straightway with imaginings of sunshine and showers, of plantings and sowings, of rising sap and swelling bud and opening blossom, of love and mating, of the joyous upward thrust of life. Sweet lovers love the spring.

“For love is crowned with the prime  
 In the spring time, the only pretty ring time.”

Everywhere, “on the seas, on mountain and in rushing stream, in the leafy habitations of the birds and in the fields of growing green”,—

“The season pricketh every gentle herte,  
 And maketh him out of his sleep to sterte.”

The dædal earth of Lucretius “puts forth her flowers, the waves of ocean laugh, the placid heavens are golden with diffused light. The fecundating west wind is unbarred, the winged creatures in air are smitten with desire, the wild animals leap with joy on the glad feeding-ground.” In England—

“Spring hangs her infant blossoms on the trees,  
 Rocked in the cradle of the western breeze.”

In pastoral lands—

“The guardians of the woolly sheep  
Stretched on the grass sweet concert keep  
Of flutes with varied trills,  
And charm the god who haunts the groves  
The god who tends the flocks, and loves  
Arcadia’s purple hills.”

Yet, “unruly blasts wait on the tender spring”. Spring is not a wholly amiable season, unless it be to those themselves in the spring of life. Spring is not reposeful; it is above all the season of restlessness and movement. It is the masculine season, the young Hercules of the seasons, crude, rough, violent—

“When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,  
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything.”

It is the youth of the year, and it has the faults of youth:—

“Oh, how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day,  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away.”

Spring is impatient, heedless, boisterous, importunate, presumptuous, eager. It bursts the seed and cleaves the soil and crumbles the wall and fires the blood. It is fickle. It laughs and weeps, it frolics and sulks, it smiles and rages, in the same day, in the same hour. It is like youth, and we love it and forgive it as we love and forgive youth, because of its beauty and its promises,

### III

“June the next, with roses scented,  
Languid from a slumber-spell;  
June in shade of leafage tented;—  
June the next, with roses scented.  
Now her Itys, still lamented,  
Sings the mournful Philomel.”

The name of summer is enveloped in flowers and heat. It recalls the scent of rose and clover blossom, the aroma of drying hay, the wholesome perfume of rain-soaked earth and growing plant. It fills the imagination with color and richness; with

glistening verdure waxing luxuriant under a golden sun, with flowers in field and hedge, with berries flaming in the foliage of bush and vine, with mown acres and skimming swallows and drowsy bees, with waves of heat rising at noonday over fields of yellowing grain, with patient cattle standing in shady pools. It revives to the sense cricket and locust etching the deep, hot silences of late July.

Summer is the constant season. It is no longer the season of beginnings and promise; it is already the season of first fruits. It is the ardent season, the season of the love that no longer deceives. Spring is masculine, and youthful; summer is feminine, a ripened woman. If any days are perfect, the days of summer are perfect days:—

“Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays.”

#### IV

But behold autumn, most blessed of the seasons,—

“Behold congenial Autumn comes,  
The Sabbath of the year.”

The days of promise fulfilled are at hand. Under skies turbulent no more with the impetuous moods of spring, nor glowing with the heat of summer, the apple-bearing autumn of Horace lifts from the fields her head beautiful with mellow fruits, or with golden plenty pours from full horn into the lap of Italy. In the lands of the vine, she sets off with bright color the dark-green cluster looking out from among the leaves. At her persuasion the grape pours forth its liquor. Autumn brings the vintage:—

“Laden deep with fruity cluster,  
Then September, ripe and hale;  
Bees about his basket fluster,  
Laden deep with fruity cluster.  
Skies have now a softer lustre;  
Barns resound to flap of flail.”

With the vintage and such light labor come gladness and merriment. The joy of autumn, however, is not the intoxication of mirth. It is the deeper satisfaction of peace and plenty. Granary

and bin are filled. Basket and crate are warm with the color and rich with the perfume of ripened fruits. We never tire of autumn's praises:—

“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun ;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run ;  
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.”

Like summer, autumn is feminine. She is the summer grown to full perfection. She is not a lover; she is a friend, a benefactress, a mother, a deity. Her embrace is infinitely calm and pure. She is of all the seasons the one most at peace with herself:—

“There is a harmony  
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky  
Which through the summer is not heard nor seen,  
As if it could not be, as if it had not been.”

Poet and sculptor of the ancient day when nature appeared to man in human form delighted to give autumn the ample lines and benevolent mien of a nobly beautiful woman. She was a matron glorified, a mother goddess, a Roman Ceres, a Greek Demeter; such as Theocritus saw her at the harvest-feast in Cos, when “once upon a time went Eucritus and he, and for a third Amyntas, from the town to the Haleis”, the day he met with Lycidas:—

“All of rich summer smacked, of autumn all :  
Pears at our feet, and apples at our side  
Rolled in luxuriance ; branches on the ground  
Sprawled, overweighed with damsons ; while we brushed  
From the cask's head the crust of four long years . . .  
All by Demeter's shrine at harvest-home.  
Beside whose cornstacks may I oft again  
Plant my broad van : while she stands by and smiles,  
Poppies and cornsheaves on each laden arm.”

For autumn to take on divine form, and to be adored, was in the way of nature. Our Pilgrim ancestors, setting in autumn the Festival of Thanks for the increase of their little fields, were moved by the same impulse that reared the altar to Demeter and Ceres. To think of the blessings of the autumn season as be-

stowed by the providence of the One God the Father may be more in accord with reason or theological fashion; but it is hardly so beautiful as to feel their source in the loving-kindness of a divine woman.

Autumn is a dual season. She has another aspect. The garnered stores, the bare fields, the leafless trees, all declare the season of decay, to be followed by the season of death.

Above all, in the latter day, when suns are low and the light more sombre, when the first frost has dropped the leaves to earth and "the chill year drives the birds beyond the sea to sunny lands", when skies are thick and gray and the cold rains begin, when—

"Gone hath the Spring, with all its flowers,  
And gone the Summer's pomp and show,  
And Autumn, in his leafless bowers,  
Is waiting for the Winter's snow,"—

then is autumn indeed the saddest of the seasons. Its image lives in the mind as that of no other season:—

"The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,  
Of wailing winds, and naked woods and meadows brown and sere.  
Heaped in the hollows of the grove, the autumn leaves lie dead;  
They rustle to the eddying gust, and to the rabbit's tread;  
The robin and the wren are flown, and from the shrubs the jay,  
And from the wood-top calls the crow through all the gloomy day."

Yet autumn is not of two separate and diverse characters. It is a unity. The suggestion of melancholy is always at hand in autumn. When the fruits are still mellowing on the trees, when the tents of corn are still pitched in the fields, before the russet-yellows and scarlets and red-browns have spread their carpet in the wood, before "November chill blows loud wi' angry sigh", autumn is already the season of sadness and solemnity. From the first linkèd-long-drawn-out chant of the locust in the soft nights of summer, melancholy enters upon her reign. She waxes as the weeks go by. In the midst of the year's abundance, in the midst of calm and repose in field and forest, there is felt on every hand the presence of the Great Enemy—or the Great Friend. Fulfilment is always solemn; fruition is less joyous than promise. The journey's end finds the pilgrim more sober

than its progress. The ending of growth is the beginning of decay. Our ancestors-in-the-spirit about the Mediterranean were in keeping with nature when long ago they placed in autumn the Day of the Dead their northern children know as All Souls'. The ways of autumn suggest death, as those of spring suggest life. Autumn is melancholy.

But autumn is none the less the happiest season, the season of melancholy indeed, but of divinest melancholy.

"Hail, thou goddess, sage and holy,  
Hail, divinest Melancholy!"

The essence of the matter is that autumn is a harmony, a blending in perfection of happiness and sadness. Her gayety is tempered to soberness by the solemn witness everywhere of work completed and death at hand. Her sadness is tempered to acquiescence by the suggestion on every hand of fulfilment accomplished and repose assured. At no other time is nature's invitation to rest so gentle and so consoling. Autumn is the season neither of joy nor of sadness: she is the season of blessedness.

All the seasons are rich. Autumn only, so deeply of the spirit is her harmony, is most golden. The temperate year is a rich diversity of rich seasons. Fortunate, more than fortunate, did they know their own blessings, they who receive year after year the rich gift of God!—

"Rich gift of God! A year of time!  
What pomp of rise and shut of day,  
What hues wherewith our northern clime  
Makes autumn's dropping woodlands gay,  
What airs outblown from ferny dells,  
And clover-bloom and sweet-brier smells,  
What songs of brooks and birds, what fruits and flowers,  
Green woods and moonlit snows, have in its round been ours!"

GRANT SHOWERMAN.

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